

INTRODUCTION

BY

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WHEN, at the age of eighteen or nineteen, Andre Gide began keeping his first journal, he already intended to be a writer. Indeed, he was even then elaborating his first literary work, a symbolic prose poem interspersed with poetry, which in recounting the conflicts of his awakening to life was to draw heavily upon that journal. His often interrupted formal education was drawing to a close, for he had left the strict and pious Protestant school that had once mortified his family by expelling him, and had even signed up at the university with a vague intention of working for an M.A. He was living in his native Paris with his widowed mother and Aunt Claire, who still treated him as an irresponsible child. Once a week he lunched with Miss Anna Shackleton, the Scottish spinster who, after tutoring his mother as a girl in Rouen, had become her lifelong companion, and with her he practiced his faltering German. Every day he played his beloved piano for hours. The summers he spent at the family estate not far from the sea in Normandy walking with his cousins, perfecting his technique at the piano, patiently herborizing with Anna Shackleton, and voraciously reading. Already versed in the French classics, he was during the next few years to discover Baude- laire and Verlaine, Dante and Goethe and Shakespeare, and the German philosophers.

But his inseparable companion — even more frequently opened than his piano, even more essential to his spiritual life than his cousin Ein- manuele, whom he was already planning to marry—was the Bible. All his thoughts were interpreted in the light of the Scriptures. If he "anointed his literary style with music/" if he even

dreamed of "writing in music," that style had already received its basic form from the Bible.

A tall, well-built youth, Andre Gide was inordinately austere and painfully shy. His upbringing had developed in him an excessive sensitivity and feminine grace. His hair fell below his ears, almost touching his stiff collar; his cheeks were covered with a soft down that was soon to become a full beard. Hypnotized by his keen dark eyes, everyone but Oscar Wilde failed to notice his full sensual lips and fine aquiline nose. He dressed with a somewhat antiquated elegance, preferring soft, flowing bow ties, a loose cape, and a broad-brimmed soft hat.

Such was the young man whose uncompromising intellectualism and devout faith rather embarrassed the other disciples at Mallarme's charmed gatherings each Tuesday evening in the early nineties or in the